Supporting carers in the workplace
Toolkit for employers

More and more employees are informally caring for elderly parents and family members – and the number is set to grow. The ability to support and retain informal carers in the workplace is increasingly important for UK business.

This two-part toolkit provides the knowledge and practical advice your business needs to support informal carers. It includes best practice support for carers from Aviva, a template 'carers passport' and other resources.

Part one: the issue

Part two: the solution

What is caring?

Caring involves providing care and support to people that is not part of a paid job. Caring can include: helping a person with shopping, preparing their meals and feeding, doing household chores, filling in forms, managing money, dressing and washing, attending appointments, as well as providing emotional support.

Parents are the main recipients of unpaid care.[1] Other recipients include partners, spouses, cohabitees, sons/daughters, other relatives or non-relatives. In 2015/16, 44% of all informal carers provided care to someone living within their household and 58% provide care to somebody living outside their household.[2] One in four of the UK's adult population have experienced 'sandwich caring' at some point in their lives: providing care for a dependent child or grandchild, as well as an elderly parent.[3]

Due to increased mobility, many carers provide care from a distance. 'Managing caring at a distance' is defined as supporting or caring unpaid for an ill, frail or disabled relative, partner or friend who may be living in another part of the town, region, country or the world.[4]

What is the financial cost?

The UK currently relies on unpaid carers. Official data shows that spend on social care in England has decreased in real terms since 2010, and the total spend on social care was £17 billion last year. One in ten people in the UK (6.5 million) are informal carers,[5] and if the time they spent caring was replaced with paid carers or nursing assistants, it would cost the UK £57 billion.[6]

A growing issue for older workers

As the population ages, the number of informal carers is set to rise from six million to nine million over the next 30 years.[7] This mostly affects older workers because three in five carers are over the age of 50, and 55-64 is the peak age for caring.[8]

In 2015/16, 33% of all adult informal carers were in full-time employment (44% of men and 26% of women).[9] Women providing informal care were much more likely to be in part-time employment than men: 23% of female carers worked part-time compared to 9% of male carers.[10]

A growing issue for business

One in nine people in your workforce are caring for someone who is older, disabled or seriously ill.[11] Growing numbers of employees will be taking on caring responsibilities whilst continuing to work, many of whom will struggle to balance the two effectively. Caring can be hard work, both physically and emotionally, and this can inevitably affect a carer's working life.

With fewer younger people set to enter the workplace and a growing retired population, the country is facing an unprecedented skills and workforce shortage. Employers need to make the most of the over-50s to fill workforce shortages, and doing so requires supporting those with caring responsibilities.

Employers must seek to understand and support their working carers in order to retain them in the workforce and maintain their wellbeing and productivity.

The business case for supporting carers

Improve productivity

Employers who have policies in place to support carers see improved service delivery, cost savings and increased productivity.[12]

Reduce turnover costs

Balancing care with work can be difficult, and many carers end up leaving work altogether, particularly if they do not receive support from their employer. The employment rate for those aged 50-64 who spend more than 10 hours a week caring is 56%, which is significantly lower for those of the same age without any caring responsibilities: 74% for men and 64% for women.

Retain skills and reduce recruitment costs

The peak age for carers is when many will have developed valuable skills, experience, knowledge and personal and professional networks. If this person leaves, their employer loses a valuable employee, as well as accumulating recruitment and training costs.

Improve brand to attract talent

The pool of people over 50, and those with caring responsibilities, is growing. Demonstrating support for carers can help businesses attract the best talent. Furthermore, as most carers aged 50-64 are female, it can support gender diversity goals.

Close the gender pay gap

Carers are mostly female[13], so supporting them to stay in work and balance caring with progression at work can contribute towards reducing the gender pay gap. The gender pay gap is largest amongst people aged 50-59, and the peak age for caring is 55-64.

Reap the rewards of intergenerational working

Helping older workers to manage their caring responsibilities alongside work enables them to continue working for longer. This can help to increase age diversity and intergenerational learning. A workforce that reflects the age diversity of the customer base will help businesses deliver the best possible customer service, as their people will relate to their customers. They will also have invaluable insight into the products and services that will be most successful. Research by Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) found that age-diverse teams enhance customer service.[14]

How carers would like to be supported

Whilst government is responsible for funding health and social care, it is crucial that businesses support informal carers to remain in work. At present, not enough support is provided, and too many carers are leaving work altogether.

- Only a third of employers (34%) have a formal, written policy or an informal verbal policy in place to support carers – decreasing to 18% for private sector employers only.[15]

- Carers UK and Employers for Carers found that nearly one in four (23%) carers do not receive any support from their employer.

- Employers for Carers found that 71% of working carers have felt lonely or isolated in the workplace as a result of being a carer.[16]

- Furthermore, 56% of the carers who had given up work to care highlighted the stress of juggling work and care.[17]

- 70% have used their annual leave to care.[18]

- 43% felt that colleagues and managers did not understand the impact of caring.[19]

- A survey of distance carers found that 43% felt their work had been negatively affected by caring and that they felt tired, stressed and anxious. One in ten cared for more than one person.[20]

What type of support do carers want?

Most carers (62%) prefer an 'enabling' organisation that gives carers permission to respond as and when they need to.[21] Only 18% of carers prefer a hand-holding organisation - one that intervenes in the employees' situations.

Providing more and better information, and signposting to external support can be extremely helpful for carers. Only 42% of the UK public would feel confident pointing people in the direction of information about caring[22], so the workplace can be a crucial source of information.

Agile working and paid Carer Leave can help to reduce the amount of annual leave taken to care.

According to a 2011 survey into distance carers, 44% would like more publicity about issues related to caring in their workplace.[23]

Many people do not recognise themselves as 'carers' – either because they do not want that label (they are just doing things for people they love), or they don't recognise that what they're doing actually equates to being a carer. Raising awareness of caring internally could encourage people to seek the support that they need.

Recommendations for action

Recommendations for HR and diversity practitioners

Collating data and insight

- Analyse your business risk: how many carers are there in your workforce, and are you facing workforce or skills shortages?

- When measuring the number of carers, use the statistic in this report (1 in 9 workers as carers) as a first point of reference. Asking carers to come forward before securing senior buy-in for carer support may raise expectations.

- Understand the needs of carers in your workforce. Consider using surveys and focus. Using both allows greater interaction with carers as some may not feel comfortable in a focus group scenario and a survey can remain anonymous.

Getting senior people on board

- Develop your business case for action, including the risk to your own business and the solutions.

Setting goals that can be measured

- Goals could include improved retention, engagement, productivity, wellbeing and satisfaction amongst carers in your workforce, as well as more carers able to self-identify.

Raising awareness

- An internal awareness raising campaign can enable people to self-identify as carers, and increase understanding and empathy.

- Use a variety of communications channels to share personal stories of caring whilst working, policy updates and other types of support available.

Empowering line managers

- Train and empower line managers so that they are able to respond to the needs of their employees with caring responsibilities with autonomy and confidence.

- Encourage informal agile working and autonomy in their teams. Communicate guidelines for accepting or refusing agile working requests.

Supporting carers

- Consider whether you can provide any paid carer leave. If you can then provide this in hours. Think about what you could provide and focus on that. Even a small amount of paid leave could make a big difference.

- Create a carer's portal with resources and signpost to external advisory services and local authorities. Ensure all employees can access a computer in their workplace.

- A peer-led carer's network with a senior level champion or chair can encourage support between staff. Appointing a senior level person to front an employee network is vital for driving change.

- Encourage staff to become 'Carers' Champions' to increase visibility of carers, create role models and promote the balancing of work and care.

- Consider providing counselling or wellbeing support to carers.

- Embed a flexible or agile working culture across the organisation. Ensure it is seen as a business solution, and not as a benefit for certain groups.

Monitoring activity

- Seek feedback from carers and line managers to inform your policy development and improvement.

- Monitor progress against your initial goals and key performance indicators.

- Monitor changes in employee surveys among the caring population.

Recommendations for line managers

Become an inclusive leader

- Offer and encourage the same training and development opportunities to carers – and those that work flexibly or have other responsibilities – equally.

- Ask carers for feedback on the impact of your management style.

Work on developing a 'speak up' culture within your team

- Encourage people to come forward with any concerns regarding issues related to being a carer.

- Challenge negative attitudes or comments towards carers.

Use and promote tools and guides

- Use the Carer Passport to help you approach carers in your team, open up the conversation, and find solutions.

- Promote the Carer Passport, the company policy on carers, and other guides and information as part of your team communications.

Normalise agile working in your team

- If agile working has been signed off by your seniors, embed it within your entire team and not just for carers, so that negative stigma is removed.

- Ask for training on managing agile teams successfully.

- Challenge negative attitudes or comments towards those who work part time or flexible hours.

Empower carers

- Encourage autonomy on the part of the carer in your team, such as responding to personal phone calls.

- Enable them to make decisions about managing their work time and tasks with their caring responsibilities.

Aviva case study: a step by step approach to developing support for carers

1 / Building the case for action →

Aviva can see very clear business reasons to improve their support for working carers. It reduces sickness absence and improves retention and productivity, all of which significantly impact business costs. Supporting carers is part of Aviva's wellbeing strategy. They found that for those with carer responsibilities this can be a stressful time and so by introducing a Carer Policy this would help carers to manage that stress.

One in nine people in work in the UK are carers.[24] At Aviva, that ratio equates to around 1,800 employees.

The initiative is sponsored by Andy Briggs, CEO of Aviva UK Insurance and Christine Nellis, People Director. It is led by Mary Bright, Senior Manager of Andy Briggs' Office, and Chair of Bristol Carer's Network. Getting senior people on board was easy due to their personal experience and emotional understanding of caring.

2 / Research and piloting →

Aviva used multiple methods to understand more about the needs of carers and their managers in the organisation. These included:

✓ A pilot project in the Bristol office, to understand more about the needs of carers and their managers and to inform the development of a Carer Policy.

✓ Engagement with employee representative bodies who were very supportive of a focus on carers.

✓ The use of expertise from external organisations such as Carers UK.

✓ A review of the questions being asked of HR in relation to carers.

✓ A review of policies and offerings for comparable groups, such as parents, to see if any could be replicated for carers.

✓ A survey of 1,000 consumers across the UK to understand their caring commitments.

3 / The findings and feedback →

Aviva found there were some key areas they could focus on to help carers to balance work and caring commitments.

• Having a published Carer Policy that was clear about the support offered to carers and called out Aviva's commitment to this group.

• Providing additional paid time off to enable carers to accompany dependants to planned appointments. Planned appointments can be a big part of some carers' lives.

• Providing this time off in hours, rather than days. Aviva found that people often needed just a short time away from work (for example, an hour) so people don't generally need full days off.

• Carers said they would value the opportunity to take a longer period of unpaid leave for the occasional times that they need to focus 100% of their time on caring.

3 / The findings and feedback *Cont.* ⟶

- Providing the opportunity for carers to provide to support for one another through employee led carer networks.

- They also found they should publicise some of their existing offerings in the Carer Policy, for example, the ability to take paid leave in an emergency and the access that colleagues have to a confidential external employee assistance programme.

- Additionally, they found that managers preferred training and support on specific situations they were managing (in relation to carers) rather than a formal training programme.

4 / The new policy and support now includes: ⟶

- ✓ 35 hours of paid time off to deal with emergencies and an additional 35 hours of paid time off for planned appointments.

- ✓ Information about flexible working and how it can be practiced effectively.

- ✓ Right to request longer-term leave. The four weeks per annum (18 weeks maximum overall) has been opened up to both parents and carers.

- ✓ Signposting to Employers for Carers portal, as Aviva is a member.

- ✓ A carers and parents community made up of colleagues called 'Aviva Carers'. Building on the success of the Bristol pilot for carers, this global network will provide the opportunity for people to mutually support each other; allowing them to maintain fulfilling careers at Aviva while caring.

- ✓ More flexibility in bereavement leave. Sadly, caring often ends in a death, and people may need flexibility and an individualised approach to taking leave, for both practical and emotional reasons.

- ✓ Access to an employee assistance programme.

- ✓ Managers can contact Aviva's Leader Advice team as and when they need training.

- ✓ The policy doesn't require proof of caring as it can be difficult for informal carers to provide this.

6 / Raising awareness ⟶   **7 / In 2018, Aviva will…**

Communications were shared with all colleagues, highlighting Aviva's commitment to carers. They included a personal story of a colleague with caring responsibilities. They had a great reaction internally with colleagues showing their support of the policy (including from those who currently have no caring responsibilities).

Their internal awareness raising illustrates their commitment to supporting carers, and importantly, gives permission to both carers and managers to take a person-centred, flexible approach to managing caring responsibilities and wellbeing.

- Roll out a Carer's Passport. This can be used by carer's to facilitate a conversation about their needs. It can be very helpful if carers change role or managers. Please find a template Carers Passport that you can use on page 10

- Monitor and improve their management information on carers. For example, by using the annual employee survey to analyse the carer population's wellbeing and engagement.

- Keep talking to their carers network to ensure the policy is fit for purpose.

"So many carers do leave work. If you have a choice between staying in work and caring for someone you love, you are going to care for the person you love, even if that has significant financial implications. A carers policy with flexible working will help us retain our talent."

Andy Briggs, CEO of Aviva UK Insurance

Resources: Template Carer Passport

Carer Passport

[Outline what the Carer Passport is, it's purpose, and how it can be used]

This passport can be completed by any employee who has caring responsibilities which may impact their work at present, or in the future.

To get started, have a meeting with your line manager and/or HR representative. Record the conversation, the date and agreed outcomes in this document.

Who owns this document: _____

Who was involved in the conversation: _____

Date of meeting: _____

Notes / outcomes: _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Review date: _____

What is the Carer Passport?

The Passport is designed to support discussions between carers and line managers / HR on the support needed to balance work with caring. It aims to maximise the potential of each employee and remove any barriers to inclusion and progression at work.

Carers record who was involved in the conversation, when it happened and the agreed outcomes. A review would normally take place every six months but it can be more frequent if the carer's circumstance changes.

The document should be kept confidential once completed and can be stored by the carer themselves.

More Carer Passport resources can be found on the [Carers Passports website](#)

Resources: other guides for employers and carers

For employers

Case study: Award Winner 2015 - Centrica - Supporting Carers

BITC

Toolkit: Supporting older workers through transitions

BITC

Toolkits: Supporting carers at work - essential guides

Employers for Carers

Business case: Why is supporting carers so important right now?

Employers for Carers

Report: Creating an enabling for carers in the workplace

CIPD

Report: Supporting Working Carers: The Benefits to Families, Business and the Economy

Carers in Employment Task and Finish Group

Report: Helping employers supporting working carers

The Work Foundation

Report: Helping employers supporting working carers

The Work Foundation

For carers

Guide: Balancing work and care: a carer's guide

Skills for Carers

Guide: Your statutory rights in work

Carers UK

Toolkit: Being heard: a guide to self-advocacy for carers

Carers UK

Advice line: Carers UK Advice line | 0808 808 7777

Guide: Looking after someone – information and support for carers

Carers UK

References

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[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] Carers UK (2011) Caring at a Distance: bridging the gap.

[5] Carers UK (2018) Make Connections, Get Support. https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/make-connections-get-support

[6] ONS Digital (2017)

[7] Employers for Carers: Business Case. Available at: http://www.employersforcarers.org/business-case

[8] DWP and ONS (2017) Family Resources Survey 2015/16. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600465/family-resources-survey-2015-16.pdf

[9] Ibid

[10] Ibid

[11] Employers for Carers: Business Case. Available at: http://www.employersforcarers.org/business-case

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[13] DWP and ONS (2017) Family Resources Survey 2015/16. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600465/family-resources-survey-2015-16.pdf

[14] CIPD. 2014. Managing an age-diverse workforce.

[15] CIPD and Westfield Health. 2016. Creating an enabling future for carers in the workplace https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/enabling-carers

[16] Employers for Carers and Carers UK (2015) Caring and isolation in the workplace https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/caring-and-isolation-in-the-workplace

[17] Carers UK (2016) State of caring 2016 https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/state-of-caring-2016

[18] Ibid

[19] Employers for Carers and Carers UK (2015) Caring and isolation in the workplace https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/caring-and-isolation-in-the-workplace

[20] Carers UK (2011) Caring at a Distance: bridging the gap.

[21] CIPD and Westfield Health. 2016. Creating an enabling future for carers in the workplace https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/enabling-carers

[22] Carers UK (2018) Make Connections, Get Support. https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/make-connections-get-support

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